

A TRIFLING INDISCRETION.

BY HOWARD FIELDING.

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The idea of going all alone to a bachelor's apartments gave Miss Weld a feeling of impropriety. It is true that she was going only as far as the door, and her errand was of immediate and great importance; also she had known the young man since her childhood, and she expected to marry him soon, though the engagement was not even suspected by their friends.

In spite of these considerations she felt like a lawbreaker as she approached the building in which Morton had his rooms. She was very much afraid that some one would see her, and she dodged into the hall so hurriedly that



SHE CAME HASTILY UPON A GROUP OF MEN, she nearly collided with a man in overalls who was coming out with a bucket of whitewash.

She knew at once that he must be the janitor, and she was afraid he might sternly inquire what she wanted there at half past 10 in the forenoon. On the contrary, he did not even look surprised, whereupon she was angry with him and more than ever convinced that she was committing an indiscretion.

She felt a woman's impulse to stop and tell this man her errand—that she had just learned that Mr. Morton's best friend was in a peck of trouble, that she had every reason to believe Mr. Morton to be totally unaware of it and that she knew that Mr. Morton would be heartbroken if he should miss the chance to proffer instant help at such a time.

Avoiding this absurdity by a strong effort of common sense, Miss Weld hurried up the first flight of stairs. It was a crazy old building that had once been a great residence. The lower part had recently been remodeled in the interests of trade and the upper part for studios and bachelor dens. Its tenants escaped all restrictions and formalities. There was no one to care about their manners or morals, no one to receive the cards of visitors or aid or hamper them in finding whom they sought.

As she reached the foot of the second flight of stairs a man's head that had not known brush or comb that morning was suddenly thrust into the hall, and a stentorian voice cried, "Edward!"

"Yes, sir!" responded the janitor's colored assistant, looking over the banister rail above.

Miss Weld had been so startled that she had run up the second stairs as if for her life; otherwise she might have perceived that there was something going on in the hall above and might have turned back. As it chanced, she came hastily upon a group of men, some of them in shirt sleeves and all talking at once.

They blocked the passage that led rearward to Morton's door. Miss Weld knew where his rooms were. She had been in them several times with other young people and adequately chaperoned. She remembered that the hall narrowed running backward from the stairs and that Morton's parlor door was the one on the right at the end of this little corridor.

She thought to pass the group of men, but instantly perceived behind them a more serious obstacle. It was a large sideboard of antique design. Miss Weld perceived at once that the men were moving it into the suit beside Morton's. The door of those apartments was open, and the young lady caught a glimpse of the tenant enveloped in an enormous bathrobe. She had a slight acquaintance with this gentleman, but she had no inclination to meet him under these circumstances. It seemed better to wait until the sideboard should be moved in and the door closed.

Therefore Miss Weld dodged back just as the gentleman started out toward the hall. She knew that he had not seen her, and he could not do so if she remained in the shelter of the wall that curved around with the stairs. The sideboard would prevent his coming out, and she would have to wait only a few minutes. Being somewhat exhausted by the stress of her emotions, she sat down in a niche that had been intended for a statue, having first spread a newspaper over its dusty surface.

"Why in blue hades don't you bring the thing in?" inquired the owner of the sideboard.

"It's stuck, sir," replied one of the men.

Miss Weld heard this with despair. If the sideboard were going to make any trouble, she could not wait for it. Surely it would be better to go away and find a messenger office.

She reflected with pleasure that the sideboard would keep Morton in his rooms. Indeed there was not much danger of his going out. She knew his habits and had counted upon them in coming there. The young man was a writer of stories, and the forenoon was his principal work time. From 9 o'clock till 1, as he had told her, he was nearly always chained to his writing desk.

The young lady ran down the second flight of stairs, and just at the bottom of them she became aware of a familiar voice below. It was the voice of Mrs. Leland Powers, a person of great social consequence and one whose good opinion Miss Weld greatly valued.

"I can't let her see me here," cried the girl. "Why she's here herself heaven knows, and it's none of my business. But she simply mustn't see me."

She ran nimbly up the stairs again. The rear hall was still barred, but the man whom she feared was no longer visible. She stood looking over the banister railing until she saw Mrs. Powers on the second flight; then she rushed to the third.

"She must stop somewhere," said Miss Weld to herself. "I will keep ahead of her if I go to the roof."

But, glancing up the third flight, she saw, standing at the head of it, Mr. Graham Douglass and Mr. Bertie Hollis, both well known to her and the latter famed as a bearer of tales. It was simply impossible to meet them. Far rather would she face Mrs. Powers, who at least might be silent about the encounter.

The girl was leaning upon the banister rather flumpily when Mrs. Powers reached the top of the stairs. The matron seemed not in the least surprised.

"Good morning, Amy!" she said. "These stairs are perfectly dreadful, aren't they?"

And she passed on. Amy had no time to wonder at this calm and conventional greeting. Her business was to get out of that building at the earliest possible moment. Again she essayed flight, only to be halted by the horrifying spectacle of Mrs. Warner Burton and the two Hayes girls in the hall below. Dottie Hayes was sitting on the second step of the stairs, and the others were standing before her.

To be seen by those people was simply impossible. The fact that she had called upon Mr. Morton might better be published in the newspapers with pictures.

Amy dodged back just in time to escape being seen, and in doing so she came into collision with the janitor's assistant, Edward.

"Will you please see if Mr. Morton is in?" she whispered.

"No, ma'am; he ain't in," replied the black man in an equally cautious tone, "but he'll be right back, and if you'd like to wait in his room I'll let you in."

"But how can I get by that thing?" she said, pointing to the sideboard.

As she turned to do so she encountered the gaze of its owner, Mr. James Ormund, who had exchanged his bathrobe for an artist's velveteen jacket and seemed otherwise to be sufficiently clothed, though only his shoulders and head were visible. He was leaning over the lower part of the sideboard, somewhat in the attitude of one of Raphael's cherubs.

"I dunno," said the colored person, "but 'pears to me you might climb ober wid a cheer."

"Quite possible, quite possible," said Mr. Ormund. "Good morning, Miss Weld! Just wait a moment, and I'll get a chair—two chairs, in fact."

He ran into his parlor and reappeared with the necessary furniture. One of the chairs he passed across to Edward,



"WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?"

who set it down by the sideboard. Miss Weld saw that it would not be very difficult to step from the chair to what was designed as the front part of the sideboard, upon which she could walk across and then descend by the other chair on the far side.

That she should be invited to perform such a feat seemed to her only a natural sequence in this nightmare adventure. It was unreal, but not more so than the preposterous appearance of all these people whom she knew just at the moment when their presence was least desirable and in the last place in the world where she could have expected to find them. It simply couldn't be true. It must be some sort of a dream.

The sound of voices below let her know that her friends were advancing upon her. She sprang up into the chair and thence to the sideboard. Behind it she saw safety.

Just then there was a ripping sound, accompanied by a great jerk upon her skirts. Theshock turned her half round, and she sat down upon the higher portion of the sideboard in a manner that was ridiculously easy.

At this moment the round face of Dottie Hayes appeared in her field of vision.

"Why, Amy Weld!" she exclaimed. "What in the world are you doing up there?"

Perhaps the remark of Mrs. Leland Powers may have been lingering in Amy's brain and have unconsciously shaped her ridiculous reply.

"These stairs are so tiresome," she said. "I—I—just stopped to rest!"

"Well, you selected a nice place!" said Dottie. "What was the matter with the chair?"

It is wonderful how readily Satan supplies a lie for any human creature's need.

Ordinarily Amy Weld was the most truthful of women, yet at this juncture she found no difficulty in uttering a large and shameless falsehood.

"I was sitting in the chair," she said. "When a horrid mouse ran out of the wall and frightened me nearly to death. So I just jumped right up here."

She gently disengaged her dress from the nail which had caught it and stepped down by means of the chair. The mention of the mouse frightened all question of veracity out of the minds of the other ladies. They ran toward the next flight of stairs, but as they reached the bottom Burton turned and said:

"Of course you're here for Signor Bevanini's concert?"

Amy thought she saw the woman glance backward over the sideboard in the direction of Morton's door, so she hastily replied:

"Why, of course. I'll come right along with you."

She had remembered Signor Bevanini and his habit of giving forenoon recitals for his fashionable pupils and their friends. She had not the pleasure of the signor's acquaintance and had not known that his studio was in that building, but she accepted that fact with relief and plodded up stairs in the wake of Mrs. Burton.

The large room at the front of the house was well filled with society peo-



QUICK AS THOUGHT HE HAD TAKEN HER HAND.

ple. At the door Signor Bevanini's "man," in something like livery, was acting as usher, and Amy perceived with horror that the fellow was accepting a ticket from each of the Hayes girls. Mrs. Burton already had hers in her hand.

"I—I'm afraid I've left my card at home," said Amy.

"Never mind," responded the elder woman. "Signor Bevanini will remember you."

"I will call him," said the polite servant, leading Mrs. Burton away and leaving Amy standing at the door of that room which seemed to be filled with eyes—great, staring eyes—all turned in her direction.

Of course the signor would remember. He would recall with absolute distinctness that he had not sent any card to Miss Weld, of whose existence he had never before heard.

"The wages of sin is death," murmured Amy, shutting her eyes and leaning against the door jamb, half fainting. "I'll never survive this!"

She was aroused by a voice close to her ear. It was the ebony assistant janitor who spoke—in a stage whisper.

"Mr. Morton has come," he said. And Dottie Hayes, just within the door, laughed aloud.

At this extreme moment, when it seemed to Amy that the eyes of a universe were upon her, Morton himself appeared, coming up the stairs four at a time. Quick as thought he had taken her hand.

Now, it happens that Morton is a very handsome man, endowed by nature with many graces of manner and with dignity enough for four kings. It was perfectly amazing how his presence solved the situation. All the women in the signor's studio were looking enviously at Amy and no longer with a question. The signor came hurrying up and greeted his dear friend Morton, and then he ushered the two into the best place available.

Everybody settled down quietly. Mr. Morton and Miss Weld had come to the concert; that was all.

"I came to tell you about Ernest Hargrave," Amy whispered, "and I've had such an awful time."

"It was splendid of you to come!" he replied. "I wouldn't have missed knowing for anything in the world, but I just happened to hear about him early this morning, and I've been with him ever since."

OUR WASHINGTON LETTER.

LABOR GIVES SUPPORT TO THE SHIPPING BILL.

Let American Labor Build Ships to Sail Under the American Flag—Filibusters Are Blocking Business in the Senate.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 1.—Delegates representing labor organizations are drifting into Washington for the purpose of interviewing their senators and representatives regarding their position toward the shipping bill. It has been pointed out to a few supposedly indifferent or hostile congressmen by these labor delegations that the passage of the shipping bill is desired by the labor organizations of the country, not as a political or as a partisan, but as an industrial measure. These men talk plainly and generally very tersely. They are quoted as having said that of course some one must make money out of ships, if there are any to be built in this country, and that no sane man with capital can be expected to invest in them unless he is pretty sure of getting his money back with fair interest.

The spokesman of one delegation is thus quoted, he having been asked by his representative if he was willing to subsidize the Standard Oil company to carry its oil across the ocean: "If that company will build its ships in the United States and place American officers, seamen and firemen on board of them, instead of building them in England and putting Germans and other foreigners in command of them, with foreigners nanking up the crews, as they now do, of course I shall be willing to see a reasonable subsidy paid to the Standard Oil company—enough to make good to that company the loss it will bear from building ships at higher cost at home and of running them at higher cost under the American flag. What we want is work, and it doesn't matter to us whether the Standard Oil company or the United States or an individual furnishes it. We expect to get wages enough for our work to make it worth our while to expend our energies at it, and we expect the people who put their capital into ships will receive a return upon their investment as good as labor receives for its work."

The senate is beginning to dispose of public business with a trifle more celerity than it has shown during the preceding six weeks of the present session. With but one month remaining before the close of the session and a dozen appropriation bills yet to be acted upon, as well as the river and harbor improvement bill, the war tax reduction bill, the Great oleomargarine bill, to say nothing of pension legislation, private bills and the like, it will be clear that the senate is likely to be pretty steeply immersed in its public duties every legislative day that still remains.

The house takes up and disposes of its work with its accustomed aplomb. Nothing disturbs the serenity of its progress. Bills come up, are fairly and reasonably considered and are then peremptorily brought to a vote. The man who would attempt to filibuster in the house would be like the late lamented Billy Patterson. He wouldn't know who struck him. In the senate they do things quite differently, because there the filibuster is the king pin—that is to say, the most disagreeable and obnoxious man in that branch of congress is, by the consent of his agreeable and genial associates, allowed to say what shall and what shall not be passed through the upper branch of congress. The warped and perverted, even if honest, views of the filibuster in the senate is the standard by which public business is measured!

Some little fear is being expressed by the friends of Cuba that a year is likely to elapse after the Cuban constitution has been adopted before it can receive such consideration at the hands of congress as to result in releasing that island from further American control. The constitution will be in shape for submission to the United States almost immediately after congress has adjourned, and unless there is an extra session called—and it is generally agreed that the president will not call an extra session—the Cuban constitution will go over until next winter, and meanwhile the Cubans will be neither independent nor contented. Cubans ought to be able to console themselves with the reflection that, however unfixed their present status may be, their material condition is infinitely better than it was before the United States took the yoke of Spain from off their necks.

If congress adjourns without passing the shipping bill, the foreign shipping lobby will be fortified with another \$200,000,000 taken from the American people and which can be applied to renewing the opposition to American shipping in the next and all other congresses.

Senator Hanna is perfectly indifferent to the abuse heaped upon him by the free trade newspapers of the country, which abuse finds its source of inspiration among the foreign shipping interests and their Washington lobby.

The maritime congress being held this week in Brunswick, Ga., is but another evidence of the deep solicitude shown for American shipping interests by southern business men. If it does not favor government aid for the upbuilding of our shipping in the foreign trade, it will be the first southern organization of business men that has refused to do so. J. B. M.

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